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THE TRAINING OF TEACHERS IN SERVICE, I¹

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I have been asked to present to you in as concrete and detailed a way as possible the methods of training teachers which are pursued in St. Louis. It is always a little embarrassing to talk about one's own work, but I know you will sympathize with me and be patient with me as I try to present the matter.

Of course, as we all know, the training of teachers may be regarded from two points of view; the preliminary training—the training antecedent to appointment—and then the training in service. The type of training concerning which I have been asked to speak chiefly is the training of teachers in service, but, in order that we may understand the method of training teachers in service in our own city of St. Louis, it will be necessary for me to speak briefly of the training of teachers prior to their appointment and of the principles by which we select them, because these have a bearing on what we attempt to do for them after we have certificated them and appointed them to service in the schools.

In solving a problem of this kind every superintendent and principal realizes that the first thing to do is to take as careful account as possible of the conditions that prevail in one's own city. What we attempt to do for teachers in service depends on the native ability of the teachers themselves, on the care with which they have been selected, on the training that they have had at the time they enter the service, on the professional attitude which they themselves have, and on the readiness

¹Delivered July 16, 1918, as one of a series of lectures given during Superintendents' Week at the University of Chicago.

with which they co-operate in any effort made by the superintendent. Of course, these conditions will vary in different cities.

In St. Louis we had a set of conditions for which I was not in any sense responsible that helped us very much in reaching such a solution as we have achieved. In the days of Dr. Harris, when he was superintendent of schools in St. Louis, there was organized a society known as the St. Louis Society of Pedagogy which was made up of the school people of the city—high-school teachers and elementary teachers, the principals, supervisors, assistant superintendents, and the superintendent himself. Indeed, as the society grew, persons were drawn in from outside the city. The suburban systems encouraged their teachers to become members of this society. The society was an excellent influence in a great many ways. It stimulated interest in pedagogical questions. It has in it the spirit of Dr. Harris. There was in it also the spirit of Susan E. Blow and of Superintendent Soldan. So there grew out of the spirit of these leaders a certain attitude toward the work of teachers and toward the problems of the city at large. The society was advantaged by the fact that it had no official connection whatsoever with the administration of the school system. What went on in that society in the discussions from Saturday to Saturday was not determined in any sense by the superintendent or his staff. It consequently became a sort of safety valve for the system. One could attend the meetings and say whatever he pleased to say and say it as emphatically as he desired to say it. The society was also excellent in that it had a reflex influence on the superintendents themselves. It was well for the superintendents to be present at the meetings and hear what the other school officers had to say and also to hear what was criticized. But it had its drawbacks, its limitations, and to these I must call attention. The types of work undertaken, of course, changed according to the mood of those

who happened to have charge of the organization, and in time the teachers became satisfied with a sort of superficial study of their educational problems, and growth was not sufficiently apparent.

In addition, then, to the influence of the Society of Pedagogy which created a certain attitude toward the work of teaching, which made the solution of our problem easier, there was also in vogue in St. Louis when I first came a practice which was very influential in stimulating a desire to know more than the teachers found themselves possessing as a result of their preliminary training. That was a Saturday study class. The plan was inaugurated by Mr. Soldan to have the teachers come to the Central High School and later to the Harris Teachers College on Saturday morning. Demonstration lessons were given in their presence by the assistant superintendent who happened to be in charge of the particular subject under consideration. These demonstration lessons were observed and studied and to some extent criticized, and the apprentice teachers were called upon to report their conclusions with reference to the type of instruction which they had witnessed. Of course, this gave the assistant superintendent an opportunity to bring before the teachers the sort of thing he was standing for in the particular part of the system for which he was responsible, and as time went on a large number of teachers already appointed and in service attended these meetings in addition to the teachers in training. This class created a certain attitude toward the problems of teaching which we found later to be influential and valuable. In addition we had the regular principals' meeting, and there were many principals who had a professional attitude. These exercised a great influence in the meetings. Hence we had in St. Louis a number of influences at work before we began the present system of training teachers in service, and these influences ought to be considered and valued at their true worth. Any

other school system or strong superintendent undoubtedly will find, if he looks far enough, tendencies which he can capitalize in the direction of better training for the teachers in service.

Then came on the scene the Harris Teachers College. The College was established in 1904, and it was established for certain definite purposes. The old normal school had been discontinued, and the supply of teachers had run short. It was found that the practice of going outside for teachers—the “open-market” method—was not successful. After some legal questions had been settled, it was decided that the city should undertake the training of its own teachers; and the College was established on a rather interesting foundation. The legal opinion by which it was established was of this sort: That the public school system of the city of St. Louis had no right to take the money which was appropriated for purposes of elementary and high-school education and use that money for the training of teachers unless it was found that the school system could render better service to the elementary school and the high school by using the money in that way than it could if it simply continued the “open-market” method of supplying teachers. In other words, when it had been decided that the “open-market” method had failed and when the Board of Education had established a training school for the purpose of bettering the school system, it became evident that the Board of Education could use this new institution for any service which would directly improve the public schools. Consequently the principle on which the College was established opened up the way for us to do a large number of things of which we had not thought at first. In other words, we could give training to teachers; we could give training to janitors if they needed it, if their service to the system would be improved thereby; we could train our nurses and we could train our principals by giving courses and supplying lecturers.

With reference to the type of work which was undertaken in preparing teachers for the elementary grades, just a few words; then I pass on to consider the bearing of that on the question of the training of teachers in service. Our first problem is always to select the right sort of teacher. We found out that the supply of teachers was so short that we thought it necessary at first to take the graduates of our high schools, no matter from what rank in their schools they might come. Any graduate of a St. Louis high school could in the early years enter the Harris Teachers College. However, we found after a few years of training that a certain percentage of candidates failed, and after making a careful study of these failures we found that of the failures who came to us from the high schools about 95 per cent were in the lowest third of the class in the high school from which they graduated. That gave us our cue as to the selection of the material. The number of candidates also increased, rendering it possible for us to make a choice. We finally decided to put the new standard of entrance at the lower limit of the upper two-thirds of the graduates from our high schools. That is to say, any young woman who graduated from a St. Louis high school and ranked for four years in the upper two-thirds of her class could enter the Harris Teachers College without any more ado, provided that she passed the necessary physical examination. This principle of choice has succeeded in securing for us a very superior type of young womanhood, and we find that we have a type of material that we can make use of in carrying forward any scheme that we may see fit to inaugurate in the College and later in the schools. Consider a young woman who has the habit of succeeding who has been selected through the high-school course because whenever she meets a difficulty she does not yield; if she does not win out the first time in college and the teaching profession, she tries again and again. On the other

hand, consider a person who has been in the habit of failing, who will try once, but, failing that time, will not try again, who is accustomed to failure, or even habituated to failure; it will be found that such is a very undesirable individual to try to make into a teacher. Hence the method of selection is an important part of our plan.

After the candidates are selected we give them two years of training. The first year is given to courses at the College itself and to some work in an observation school. During the third half-year the student is sent out into the school system to apprentice in one of the Class A schools under a principal who has shown himself to be an excellent trainer of teachers. Here the teacher in training teaches and observes in every one of the grades from the first through the eighth. She is criticized and helped by every teacher with whom she works. She teaches half the time and observes half. She is criticized by the primary supervisor, who is also a helper, and by the special-subject supervisor. When she finishes that half-year of work she returns to the College for a final half-year during which her work is based on the experiences she has had during her apprentice term. The plan helps to bind the entire school system together. It prevents the training school from becoming isolated, as sometimes happens if the entire training is given over to one institution, with one local elementary school to be used for practice. Furthermore, if the training school had no real relation with the schools other than that in the College itself, there would be a tendency on the part of the principal who did not get the best results with the product of the normal school to criticize, to say that the training is not good work. If the principal is made responsible for one-fourth of the training, as he is under our plan, then he takes a different attitude; then he is careful.

The plan has another great advantage in that it keeps all the teachers in contact with the Teachers College. The young

teachers in training while going through the grades in the schools to which they are sent are observed very closely by the teacher; and if the college is worth anything at all it will come out in the work that they do in those grades under the observation of those teachers. The teachers themselves will discover it, and if the opportunity is given to them to go to that same institution they very quickly take advantage of it. We discovered that the influence of these apprentices was just of that sort. Sending forty or fifty apprentice teachers out into forty or fifty schools, one to a school, and allowing them to teach meant that every half-year something like four or five hundred teachers of the city were coming in contact with these young women, coming in contact with the spirit and influence of the training school, and in so far there would be generated a disposition on the part of the teachers in service to want to take advantage of any opportunity of further training which might be given by the normal school or the Teachers College.

When we noted the influence of the old Society of Pedagogy and also found that the young women were having an influence in the schools themselves, we decided to offer courses in what we called our extension department for teachers already in the system. This department was opened in 1906. We organized a few courses, selected the teachers, all of them members of the faculty, and obtained the permission of Dr. Soldan to announce these courses. This was done on Wednesday. On the next Monday the teachers assembled for work. We expected one hundred; instead we had seven hundred and seventy. They came with the idea of getting something, not because they were going to advance themselves, secure promotion, or increase their salaries. They had acquired a certain sort of fear, an excellent thing in a school system. It is not physical fear that we want. Personal fear we do not want where the teachers hate to have the supervisor come around. But there is a type of fear which is very

important—the fear of not measuring up to expectations, the fear of not measuring up to the reasonable expectations of one's associates and one's superiors, and, still better, the fear of not measuring up to one's own ideals which one has set for one's self. There was a realization of the fact that there are some principles underlying teaching and supervision and that every teacher may learn these principles and use them in solving the problems of the classroom. There was a feeling on the part of the teacher that she did not know enough about her work to make the interpretation of the schoolroom situations that her supervisor was inclined to make. She liked the supervisor and she feared that she would not measure up to his expectations. She realized that she would gain a certain kind of independence and a feeling of comfort if she could go to the same sort of source from which the supervisor got his principles of teaching and herself learn something of the same grounds of constructive criticism.

In the years that have elapsed since we began the work down to the present time, on account of the large number of our teachers who have taken this training much of the fear is gone and there is coming a certain objective, scientific attitude toward teaching, a new professional spirit which we feel is very important and encouraging, a spirit which does not look merely to find out what somebody's opinion may be, but a spirit which raises the question of what this thing objectively is, why the supervisor's opinion is correct, and a spirit which makes it possible for all to discuss school problems frankly and freely and to feel no offense when such a discussion takes place.

Just a few words with reference to the method of carrying the work forward. As I said, we first organized winter courses to be given in the afternoon of school days. We did not wish to interfere with the Society of Pedagogy, which held its meetings on Saturday. The Society later withdrew from

that type of work, and then we were allowed to organize extension courses on Saturday morning. We extended our work in that way, giving winter courses in the afternoons of school days and on Saturday mornings. After two years we organized our summer course for teachers, and we found that this was the best part of the extension work because the teacher was freer, fresh and active and vigorous, and could do the work very much better in the summer school.

We carried the courses forward for a number of years without any far-reaching plans for future study or credit. We did not know whether the work would be of such a nature that college credit ought to be allowed. We arranged our courses, published our bulletins, and asked the teachers to come and enroll in classes, giving them only a week to make their elections. We found that that was not getting the result that we ought to secure. The work was too aimless. It needed to be made progressive, and we began to organize the work in such a way that every teacher could have an aim and work toward that aim. We organized the courses into cycles of six years each, so that a teacher by looking at this arrangement of courses could decide six years in advance when she could get any course she wanted and could decide with certainty in order that she might plan her work for any purpose she had in mind. If she wanted to be a primary supervisor or a music supervisor, she could prepare for that position. She could arrange her courses, with the consent of the faculty, with that end in view. We have also planned for extension lecturers, bringing to the teachers the best talent that could be secured anywhere in the United States. We have had representatives of the University of Chicago and of Teachers College, Columbia, on our programs and even educators from abroad. The chief purpose of that work is to stimulate interest in certain lines of work in which we wish to establish permanent courses. For example, when we wanted to stimu-

late an interest in educational sociology, we secured Professor Suzzallo to give courses of ten lectures each on educational sociology. When we wanted to stimulate interest in the psychology of school subjects, we secured Director Judd.

One question which arose was the question whether in organizing the work of our extension department we could include supervisors and principals as well as the teachers in our plans for continued study and training. Our answer was emphatically yes. With that purpose in view we organized a principals' class, and we have had it in operation for some seven or eight years. To this the principals voluntarily give up their Saturday mornings. We study questions of supervision; we study school administration, taking advantage of anything that is best in educational literature and by studies in our own schools making all the members of the class aware of the ways in which they can apply new educational methods and sound principles to their own work of supervision.

Another question is: Should we provide a stimulus by promising a teacher who takes a certain amount of voluntary work that we will promote her or increase her salary? Emphatically, no. It takes attention away from the end on which we want to concentrate attention. We aim to cultivate a professional interest. We find that it is not necessary, in order to stimulate this sort of spirit, to offer to increase the teacher's salary for so much work done in extension. We want the idea of merit absolutely to predominate in the school system. We want that notion to be the fundamental one. We want the teacher to expect promotion, not for some service outside the school system, but for some service for which she receives pay. Whatever she does that results in actual improvement in classroom teaching will be evident, but to say to her, "We will promote you provided you take so much training in the Harris Teachers College," would be a vital mistake; hence we do not offer any such reward as the increased pay and the certainty of

promotion. To be sure, the courses often contribute indirectly to promotion through their contribution to classroom efficiency, but the promotion comes only when efficiency is shown.

We organize many courses with a view to equipping teachers of experience for new and more elaborate types of work. We are discovering that we have a great variety of types of service which are different from the ordinary work of teaching the normal child in the elementary grades, and we are arranging to separate these special types of service. For example, we have work with defective children and with crippled children; we have the work that was done by teachers promoted into the junior high school. In these special lines we make provision for promotion. We also try in every case to give prompt recognition to actual schoolroom merit. As a result, we give the teacher ample opportunity to move forward, not because she takes the extension work, but because she demonstrates her ability to do the kind of thing she is employed to do at the time she is employed to do it.

I have tried to present the general plan of organization of the work of the Harris Teachers College, the types of service that we try to render. In the next discussion I shall endeavor to draw some further conclusions regarding our own school system and apply our experience to other systems.